



February 21, 2006

Honorable John P. Stakoe
PO Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909

Subject: HB 4138 (The Inclusive Home Design Act)

Dear Representative Stakoe,

I'm writing this letter on behalf of the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America (MPVA) urging that the Local Government & Urban Policy Committee hold a public hearing on the Inclusive Home Design Act (HB 4138) which incorporates basic physical accessibility improvements into the new construction of single-family homes built with state funding.

This legislation would require 50% of newly-built single family homes receiving state funds from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) to meet the following specific standards:

- Include at least one accessible, or "zero step," entrance into the home.
- Ensure all doorways on the main floor have a minimum of 32 inches of clear passage space.
- Build at least one wheelchair accessible bathroom on the main floor.
- Place electrical and climate controls (such as light switches and thermostats) at reachable heights.

The proposed legislation is based on the concept of Visitability. Visitability is associated with the movement for affordable, sustainable and inclusive design approach for integrating basic accessibility features into all newly built homes and housing. For example, in Georgia "Concrete Change" promotes visitability as a project of the Statewide Independent Living Council of Georgia which encourages builders, contractors, realtors, architects, community development groups and others to commit to Visitability standards.

Visitability improves access for all people, not only people with disabilities. For example, it allows Seniors to age in place, and it makes movement into and out of the home more manageable for parents with children and baby strollers.

The Visitability concept is gaining momentum in states and municipalities around the country. These communities realize that when we make homes accessible, it benefits not only today's disability community, but also all of us who are friends and family members of a people with disabilities, and it will benefit all of us as we grow old and acquire a disability.

Visitability features are basic accessibility design concepts that are inexpensive to implement at the initial period of design and construction. Evidence suggests that when visit-able units are planned for at the outset, costs are minimal. In researching the costs associated with visitability, Concrete Change found that as little as \$200 is needed to provide basic access.

The spirit of visitability is as important as its features and benefits. It sends a powerful message that our state and municipalities will embrace people with disabilities with open arms by ensuring that barriers that prohibit them from visiting their family, friends and colleagues will no longer be tolerated. In essence, it's about creating a home where the welcome mat truly welcomes everyone.

MPVA is supportive of any legislation that allows veterans with mobility impairments the ability to live in their communities independently without having to encounter any architectural barriers.

Therefore, MPVA urges that the Local Government & Urban Policy committee hold a public hearing on historic legislation that will assure that our state housing dollars will be used in the most cost effective manner, while ending the practice of excluding entire segments of our population.

MPVA members are honorably discharged veterans of the United States Armed Services who have incurred spinal cord injury or disease resulting in paralysis requiring the use of a wheelchair for mobility.

If you have any questions, please feel free to give me a call at 248-476-9000 or email me at mharris@michiganpva.org

Thanks for your consideration on a issue most important to our membership!

Sincerely,

Michael F Harris, Deputy Executive Director
Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America

Cc: Maurice L. Jordan, Executive Director, MPVA
Kevin Elya, President, MPVA